



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Huron-Manistee National Forests
Baldwin/White Cloud Ranger Station
650 N. Michigan Avenue
Baldwin, MI 49304

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File Code: 1950/2350

Date: February 23, 2007

Dear Friends of the Forest;

The Baldwin/White Cloud Ranger District of the Huron-Manistee National Forest is seeking your input on the 56th Street Snowmobile Trail Relocation proposal. This project would occur in Sections 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 of Lake Township, Lake County, Michigan. The initial scoping of this project was completed in August 2004. A second scoping, reflecting comments received on the initial proposal, was completed in February 2005. The successful implementation of this re-route relies upon obtaining easement on private land in key locations. In March of 2006, the project was put on hold because the necessary easements were not in place at that time. Since that time, a suitable easement has been obtained. This easement would allow the trail to pass through private property from Forest Service lands onto 68th Street.

Background

In September 2003, the Trail Riders Snowmobile Club submitted a proposal to the Baldwin/White Cloud Ranger District to relocate a portion of the snowmobile trail that has historically used the shoulder of Evergreen Road and 56th Street in Lake Township. Road construction on 56th Street, completed in July 2003, narrowed the shoulder of the road, creating an unsafe situation by forcing snowmobile traffic into automobile traffic lanes. In August 2004, the Forest Service issued a scoping letter seeking public comments on a proposed re-route of this trail that would remove snowmobile traffic from the narrowed portion of 56th Street. Based on comments received on this proposal, the plan was re-evaluated by the Forest Service and an alternative proposal was submitted for public comment in February of 2005. In January 2006, after considering the public comments received from the February 2005 scoping letter and those received in response to the October 2005 30-Day Notice and Comment Period letter, a decision to implement the plan was made. This decision was withdrawn in March 2006, however, after it was learned that the easement through private property that linked the proposed trail with 68th Street had been withdrawn. The current proposal would implement the plan as developed and described in the January 2006 Decision Memo, with the exception of an alternative private property easement location for linking the trail with 68th Street. The "Detail View" map that accompanies this letter illustrates the difference between the current proposed route and the route that was proposed in February of 2005.

Purpose and Need for the Proposal

The purpose of this proposal is to increase public safety by routing snowmobile traffic off a narrow and heavily ditched paved public road, thereby decreasing the number of interactions between automobile and snowmobile traffic.



Proposed Action (See Attached Maps)

56th Street Snowmobile Trail Relocation. Located in sections 11, 12, 14, and 15, T17N R14W, Lake Township, Lake County, Michigan. The proposed route will utilize National Forest and private land, and plowed portions of 68th Street and Evergreen Road, county roads. The following projects are included:

The existing snowmobile trail will be relocated beginning in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 11 of Lake Township, utilizing Forest Service Road 5467. The trail will follow this road for approximately .7 miles until reaching the Rosebush Bend river access site. The trail will then follow an existing two-track road that is currently closed to motor vehicles, to the southwest in Section 12 and then south in Section 14 for approximately .9 miles. A bridge that will accommodate snowmobile traffic and grooming equipment will be constructed across an unnamed tributary of the Pere Marquette National Scenic River in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 14. The Trail Riders Snowmobile Club (Trail Riders) has obtained an easement from a private landowner to utilize an existing road (approximately .3 miles) in the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of NW $\frac{1}{4}$ Section 13. The trail will then turn west on 68th Street and utilize the plowed portions and rights-of-way of 68th Street and Evergreen Road for approximately 1.2 miles. The trail will then follow existing un-plowed two-track roads in Section 15 and will join the existing trail at 21st Street. An easement has been obtained by the Trail Riders Snowmobile Club to cross private property in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of SW $\frac{1}{4}$ Section 15 (Block 106 of the Silver Lake Plat). Total length of the reroute is approximately 4 miles. Total length of existing trail being replaced is approximately 3.5 miles.

The proposed relocation will require minimum brushing in sections 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 of Lake Township, and the removal of a few trees greater than 9" dbh (diameter at breast height) to meet the 14 foot clearing standards (12 foot trail tread and 2 foot vegetative clearing) for snowmobile trails.

This proposal falls under Categorical Exclusion 31.2(1) – Construction and reconstruction of trails. A recent court order (*Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck*, CIV F-03-6386 JKS) requires that categorically excluded actions that involve the construction of new OHV routes provide for public notice and the opportunity to comment. We are providing that notice and opportunity via a legal notice in the ***Lake County Star***.

How to Comment and Timeframe

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments on this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of this notice in the ***Lake County Star*** (until April 2, 2007). The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period. Do not rely upon dates or time frame information provided by any other source. Regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period (36 CFR 215.6).

Written comments must be submitted to: Chris Loudenslager, PO Box Drawer D, Baldwin, MI 49304 or faxed to (231) 745-2345. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00 – 4:30 M-F, excluding holidays.

Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours via telephone to Chris Loudenslager at (231) 745-4631 ext. 3122 or in person to at 650 N. Michigan Avenue, Baldwin, MI 49304, or at an official agency function (i.e., public meeting) that is designed to elicit public comments on the 56th Street Snowmobile Trail Relocation Project.

Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text (.rtf), Word (.doc) or Portable Document Format (.pdf), to comments-eastern-huron-manistee-baldwin-white-cloud@fs.fed.us. Comments must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic comments.

Appeal Eligibility

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Only those who provide comments during this comment period are eligible to appeal a decision under the regulations. Individuals and organizations wishing to be eligible to appeal must provide the following information:

1. Name, address, telephone number, organization represented, and title;
2. Title of the proposed action;
3. Specific facts or comments (see 36 CFR 215.2) on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision;
4. Signature or other verification of identity upon request; identification of the individual or organization who authored the comments(s) is necessary for appeal eligibility;
5. For multiple names or multiple organizations, a signature must be provided for the individual authorized to represent each organization, or for each individual that wishes to have appeal eligibility, and
6. Individual members of organizations must submit their own substantive comments to meet the requirements of appeal eligibility as an individual; comments received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only.

Requests for additional information or questions regarding this proposal should be made to Chris Loudenslager, PO Box Drawer D, Baldwin, MI 49304, (231) 745-4631 ext. 3122, or to christopherloudenslager@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,

/S/ Leslie E. Russel

LESLIE E. RUSSEL

District Ranger

Enclosures (3)

2/23/07

2/23/07

DATE

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is an equal opportunity provider and employer.